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HOME RULE—AND AFTER

BY FRANK P. JONES

It is a matter of peculiar difficulty for an Irishman who has been in intimate contact with the people of Ireland in all parts of the country, and who, like the present writer, filled a position of prominence in their political movements, to write without bias of the position of Irish affairs as they are to-day. There are, however, certain aspects of the situation the facts of which, to be properly appreciated, require no tinting, either of Orange or of Green. It is these, and these alone, that will be here considered.

There can be no doubt that within the next few months an Irish Parliament will be set up in Dublin. The powers of this Parliament will be limited: it will not have the collection of its own or the Imperial taxes; customs and excise dues will remain in the hands of England; it will have no immediate control over the Postal Service, and the power to declare war and all questions relating to the Army and Navy will continue solely within the jurisdiction of the Parliament at Westminster. Within these and other well-defined limits the College Green Parliament will have control over "purely Irish affairs."

A period of critical uncertainty, extending over many months, must elapse between the placing of the bill on the Statute Book and its enactment. A general election will take place in England. If the Liberals are again returned to power, as at present seems probable, the situation will undergo no serious change. Should the Unionists receive the confidence of the electors and a working majority clear of the Irish vote, they may attempt the repeal of the measure, or such drastic amendment as would render it worse than useless. They would do this, however, at the risk of an armed conflict in Ireland that would be on a scale compared with which the insurrection of 1798 would pale into insignificance.

The position in Ulster is not so complicated as it appears at first sight. The majority of the Anti-Home-Rulers are honestly convinced that their liberties, if not their lives, would be insecure under the jurisdiction of a Parliament sitting in Dublin. During a recent tour through the most Protestant districts of the northeast of Ulster the writer came in personal contact with many of the men enrolled in the army of resistance. One and all declared they would never submit to being governed by Mr. Redmond and the United Irish League. As to the Ancient Order of Hibernians, few of them mention the name without indulging in profanity. At the same time I met many Protestants who were convinced Home-Rulers, and who refused to believe that their Catholic fellow-countrymen would make any distinction of creed in the government of the country. The actual condition of affairs and the probable solution of the problem may perhaps be best summed up in the words of a well-known Protestant minister of Belfast, whose name, for obvious reasons, it would be unwise to publish at this date. He said:

The opposition to Home Rule here is genuine only on the surface. It has been engendered and kept alive by the recollection of ancient prejudices and will disappear like mist before the rising sun once Protestant and Catholic get a fair chance to work together. At present both sides are in a state of tension. Protestant and Catholic are standing aloof, and for this I blame the Catholic more than the Protestant. If the Catholic were more sociable, the Protestant, I believe, would be quite ready to meet him half-way. Under Home Rule this will happen, for both sides will recognize that the feud is at an end, and that the only sensible thing to do will be to settle down and work together for the common good of the country, which, after all, belongs just as much to the Irish Protestant as to the Irish Catholic.

Very similar sentiments, though in different words, were expressed by Archbishop Walsh, in the course of a conversation at his residence in Dublin. "Under a native Parliament," he declared, "Irishmen of all creeds will work amicably together for the uplifting of the nation. There will be no distinction of religious belief in the administration of the country." All my own observations in Ireland during the last four years go to strengthen the belief that the view expressed by these two eminent Irishmen is a correct forecast of what will happen under Home Rule as regards the relations of Catholic and Protestant.

There is, however, another factor in Ireland infinitely more important and calculated to play no small part in the

future destiny of the land—that of the Irish National Volunteers, a movement of which remarkably little is known on this side of the Atlantic. It was started in December of last year, and was inspired in the first place by the success attending the Ulster Volunteers, organized by Sir Edward Carson, to fight “to the death, if need be,” against the establishment of a Parliament in Dublin. Previously, the right to carry arms was denied by statute to the men of Ireland, but when Sir Edward Carson formed his army the Liberal Government laughed his war talk to scorn, while the Unionists helped him actively and openly. It was, therefore, not unnatural that the Nationalists should say that what the Ulstermen could do they could do also. In a few weeks the Volunteer movement had spread like wildfire through the land, until to-day every town and village has its company of raw recruits drilling, marching, and learning the trade of the soldier. In spite of the proclamation against the importation of arms and ammunition, both are pouring into the country, at the north and at the south, and before the present year is at an end Ireland will have, at a conservative estimate, two hundred thousand men in arms.

The declared objects of the National Volunteers are twofold. In the first place, should the Ulstermen decide to appeal to the arbitrament of the sword in their endeavor to render impossible the operation of the Irish Parliament, and the English army, as happened recently at The Curragh, refuses to intervene, the Volunteers will stand at the back of that Parliament and defend it with bullet and bayonet. There is little likelihood of anything like this coming to pass. Once the Irish Parliament is an established fact, the Ulstermen will devote all their energies to securing adequate representation in its deliberations. The men of the North are too sensible and business-like to cut themselves off from the rest of the country and the people who form their best customers.

What will happen is that the Irish Volunteers will demand through the Irish Parliament the abolition of all the restrictions and disabilities imposed upon it by the present Bill—in other words, the complete legislative independence of the country.

In the agricultural Midlands, in the rebel South, away in the wild mountainous regions of the West, one hears the same story. The Parliament, as at first constituted, will

offer no final settlement of the Irish question. The Volunteer movement has aroused all the old spirit of the people, the old belief that the only solution of the Irish problem was the complete and absolute control of Irish affairs by the Irish people. Out in the fields, along the country lanes, and by the firesides they tell you that the day has dawned at last when Ireland will again become a nation among the nations of the earth, when all the old grievances will be forgotten and forgiven in the enjoyment of a liberty that has so long been denied.

Strangest of all to the outsider will be the fact that in this spirit is manifested no bitterness of feeling to the Orangemen. On the contrary, they are looked to to aid in the promotion of these objects. It is believed they will be just as keen to fight for the independence of Ireland as they at present are to uphold their own liberties. All that is required, it is thought, is that they should recognize that these liberties are inextricably bound up with those of their fellow-countrymen. The Irish Volunteers have no animus against their comrades of the North; all that they desire is that they should all work together for the good of their country. After conversation with the leaders of the movement, The O'Rahilly, Sir Roger Casement, and Professor Eoin MacNeill, while much they said was in confidence, it may be stated that one and all believed that the Ulstermen would join them and work with them before two years had passed.

Glancing back, for a moment, at the history of Ireland, and particularly at that period when Grattan's Parliament achieved the repeal of Poynings's Law, one is forced to the conclusion that something similar will happen in the near future. Then, as now, Ireland possessed a Volunteer force recruited—it is strange to think of this now—from the Protestants of Ulster. These men, from being formed to defend the country against foreign invasion, came to turn their eyes upon their own land and her wrongs. Then they assembled in convention and demanded the freedom of their country. They marched from the Rotunda—where the present Volunteers were inaugurated—and up to College Green with the significant legend, hung from the muzzles of their cannon, "Free Trade or This," and the Tory element in the Parliament surrendered at discretion. A little while later and the same Volunteers demanded that their Parliament

should be freed of the veto of the English legislature, and it was freed. For one short period Ireland enjoyed the unfettered control of her own affairs. Then those Volunteers were disbanded, the Parliament corrupted, and the Act of Union passed.

This, of course, is ancient history, but a reminder of it will help to make clear what is contemplated after Home Rule. When the Volunteers were started the appeal made all over the country was to the spirit of the Volunteers of 1782. To-day little secrecy is observed regarding the intentions of those who are controlling the new movement as to what they will do if they get the chance. Already arrangements are being made for a convention on the lines of that held at Dungannon over a century ago, and it is safe to say that resolutions will be adopted demanding the complete legislative independence of Ireland. That the Irish Parliament will eventually uphold these demands goes without saying, and thus the crisis in Irish affairs will become more acute than ever.

Just how the British Government will handle the situation will, of course, depend very much upon the general political trend of events. It is not likely that military coercion will be attempted, inasmuch as the spectacle would not be one calculated to enhance the prestige of the Empire in the eyes of the world. That, at least, is the belief expressed by the Volunteer leaders. The method adopted would rather partake of the opposite extreme—the granting of such demands as were considered consistent with the integrity and safety of the Empire. Thus the various disabilities and restrictions embodied in the Home Rule Bill would be removed. The consequent danger is that Ireland would continue to make demands until the limits of concession were reached, whereupon there would result a disastrous civil war that would shake to its foundations British authority throughout the world.

These are no wild imaginings or dreamy visions, but actual possibilities. It should be remembered that the majority of those in control of the Volunteers are professing or secret advocates of a free and independent Irish Republic, men and women who are devoting all their time and money to the furtherance of their desires to see Ireland freed entirely from English domination. Moreover, the Irish Parliamentary Party, at the outset of the movement, knowing

the men who were directing it, did all in their power to discourage it, mainly because they feared it would frighten the English electors and the Government, yet, in spite of this, the movement has spread with a rapidity that even its most ardent advocates never imagined possible. What is the inference? Obviously that the rank and file are in sympathy with the spirit of their leaders, and will, as soon as the opportunity comes, demand that larger measure of freedom of which the Home Rule Bill is only the beginning.

If this be the case, before two more years have passed, Great Britain will be faced with the most serious crisis in the course of her long and eventful history.

FRANK P. JONES.